

Introduction

For more than a decade, the Army had a hiring freeze or was downsizing through reductions in force. Numerous surveys indicated that there were shortages of scientific and engineering (S&E) personnel Armywide. These surveys also indicated that the workforce was aging and that without new hires, the Army could lose its capability to keep up with new technology in the future. As a result, in December 1998, the U.S. Army Armament Research, Development and Engineering Center (ARDEC) at Picatinny Arsenal, NJ, was given the green light to begin recruiting interns. The goal was to hire the "best and the brightest" to serve as tomorrow's leaders.

Since March 1999, through a carefully thought-out and well-orchestrated plan of action, Picatinny Arsenal has hired 153 new interns with a median grade point average (GPA) of 2.8. More than 56 percent of these new employees have superior academic achievements and/or master's degrees in complex academic disciplines including computer science, mathematics, physics, metallurgy, and engineering.

Background

The work performed at Picatinny is very specialized. Because of this, locating candidates at the journeyman level is difficult, if not impossible. Therefore, it is important for Picatinny to successfully recruit entry-level personnel and cultivate their own S&E workforce.

Historically, our most successful recruitment campaigns required years of developing relationships

with colleges and universities and having individual managers stay in touch with their alma mater and with graduating seniors to keep the workforce replenished. Picatinny, as with most Army installations, had been out of the intern business since the late 1980s; therefore, all alliances

PICATINNY ARSENAL'S MODEL FOR INTERN RECRUITMENT

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with local colleges and universities had to be re-established.

Plan Of Action

The recruiting process began with senior management establishing a plan of action that involved the Civilian Personnel Advisory Center (CPAC), the Civilian Personnel Operations Center (CPOC), and Picatinny's technical managers. This effort was made a priority for their research and development (R&D) management and CPAC team and, as a result, the effort also became a priority for CPOC. Senior management also ensured that ample funding was available for all facets of the pro-

gram. Because of the high cost of living in the New Jersey/New York area, planning, commitment, and funding were all key to the success of the campaign.

CPAC held numerous planning sessions with the Northeast CPOC, including members of the Delegated Examining Unit (DEU) and the Customer Focus Branch (CFB) who provide classification and recruitment service to Picatinny Arsenal. The extensive planning and coordination between Picatinny and CPOC contributed to the very successful outcome.

The next step for Picatinny's senior management was to enlist talented and personable managers and make them effective recruiters. CPAC put this elite group of prospective recruiters through a rigorous training program to teach them the personnel aspect of the federal hiring process. Simultaneously, CPAC designed an aggressive advertising campaign. Strategies included cable TV and news media coverage, paid radio and newspaper advertising, Internet recruitment, mass mailings to college placement offices and minority organizations, and an employee awareness campaign. Additionally, CPAC developed recruitment brochures and displays to help publicize the arsenal at job fairs and other career events.

Recruitment Process

Since 1999, Picatinny Arsenal has hosted three job fairs. Additionally, Picatinny personnel attend career expos and recruit year-round at local colleges and universities. Their presence at recognized engineering schools such as New Jersey Institute of Technology, Stevens Institute of Technology, Penn State, Rutgers, and

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Lehigh University ensures that future graduates are aware that Picatinny Arsenal is a desirable employer. Additionally, recently hired interns are becoming valuable members of the recruitment team.

Held at the Officer's Club, Picatinny's job fairs have played a significant role in the success of the recruiting endeavor. Job fairs include a tour of Picatinny Arsenal so potential applicants can learn about the varied programs and associated opportunities at the arsenal. Additionally, various ARDEC organizations have visual displays that describe Picatinny's R&D mission.

Trained recruiters from various technical organizations interview applicants, and representatives from the personnel community are onsite to pre-screen candidates for basic qualifications. Tentative job offers are made the day of the job fair, and final offers are made within 3 weeks following the fair—a time considered on par with industry.

Because potential candidates often interview with several companies at the same time, there is a strong correlation between finding talented candidates and being able to make timely, firm job offers. Players in the recruitment process have agreed to make job offers a priority. This requires a great deal of team-

work and coordination among the Picatinny CPAC, the CPOC's DEU, and members of the CFB who service Picatinny. Because of these efforts, formal commitments are normally made to candidates within 3 weeks of their initial application. Everyone knows the importance of having applicants submit the proper forms (e.g., transcripts to verify GPA) within the required timeframe, and everyone works together to accomplish this task. This process succeeds because of the excellent working relationship between CPAC and CPOC.

Diversity in the S&E field is a goal for Picatinny. As such, Picatinny actively recruits from historically black colleges and the University of Puerto Rico. Additionally, Picatinny recruiters attend on-campus minority job fairs. To date, 19 women and 45 minority scientists and engineers have been hired.

Hiring Incentives

Interns are hired at grade levels ranging from GS-05 to -09 depending on their qualifications. As an additional enticement, all eligible interns are given a recruitment bonus. In most cases, the bonus is as much as 25 percent of their starting base salary. Engineers hired at the GS-05 and -07 levels also receive a one-time

accelerated promotion after 6 months of training, and all interns receive noncompetitive promotions to the full-performance grade of GS-12. Each new intern is assigned a mentor to help ease him or her into a new career field.

Summary

Picatinny Arsenal's management is very excited about the prospect of rejuvenating its workforce. All personnel involved are pleased with the number of high-quality, talented candidates being recruited. The hiring of 153 interns, 56 percent of whom have superior academic achievement or master's degrees, is evidence that the recruiting effort at Picatinny Arsenal is paying off.

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